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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3076
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1372
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3419
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2805
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000482

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS
AND PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN TALAS

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador hosted a lunch in Talas on May 14 with local members of government and civil society and Talas-based Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV). The discussion was lively with members of two local NGOs in particular complaining of problems with Islamic religious extremism, lack of support for NGOs, and concerns about the upcoming Presidential election. Invited government officials agreed that the threat of Islamic extremism in Talas Oblast is real but claimed that other concerns were not valid. Following the lunch, the Ambassador visited the Orthodox Church of Saint Great Martyr Dimitry Solunsky in Talas city, where she discussed the religious situation in the Oblast with the pastor. End Summary.

12. (C) As part of her first trip to the Talas region, the Ambassador hosted a lunch on May 14 to which were invited a mixture of local government and NGO officials and the PCVs serving in Talas city. The local officials who attended included a Deputy Mayor of Talas city; Baktygul Saparbaeva, Deputy Governor of Talas Oblast; Seren Sheishenov, Director of Manas 1000; Guljamilya Ashirbaeva, Director of Talas Nursing School; and Dilyara Molgogazieva, Director of Jarandyk Demilge, an organization established with the support of NDI.

NGO REPRESENTATIVES' CONCERNS

13. (C) Sheishenov, clearly the most vocal of the group, began by telling the Ambassador that the Talas region had a growing problem with Islamic religious extremism, specifically citing the presence of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members in the oblast. Sheishenov and Molgogazieva both expressed concerns about an increased level of religious extremism and propaganda activities on the part of local Islamic-affiliates.

14. (C) Sheishenov appealed to the Ambassador for financial

support to host a religious tolerance conference in Talas in October 2009 to which would be invited some 250 representatives of Kyrgyzstan-based religious organizations. Sheishenov noted that Talas was the ideal location for such a conference, given that it was the true center of Kyrgyzstan in terms of culture and beauty. Local government representatives agreed that Islamic extremism is on the rise and blamed foreigners with deep pockets for it. They claimed these foreigners, mostly Arabs and Pakistanis, prey on the Kyrgyz poor, especially young people, and literally pay them to get involved in Islamic extremism.

15. (C) Moving on to another topic, Sheishenov complained about the government decision to hold the Presidential election on July 23, questioning both the authority of the government to set such a date and its motives in selecting a summer-time date. Sheishenov went on to note that people have lost faith in the election process, and that the Talas population does not believe that elections in Kyrgyzstan can be conducted in a free and fair manner. Both Sheishenov and Molgogazieva complained of a lack of NGO activity in Talas, observing that the NGO community was more active in years past. Both suggested that there was a lack of crucial government funding for local NGOs, and stated that organizations such as the OSCE were less active today than they had been in the past.

16. (C) During a discussion on local relations with Kazakhstan, Sheishenov voiced concern regarding multiple unresolved demarcation disputes that existed along the border with Kazakhstan. Further, when discussing the presence of gold mines in the Talas oblast, Sheishenov noted that there were currently legal and ecological concerns impeding the

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progress of their operations. Sheishenov expressed concern regarding the impact that mining activities had on the oblast's water and other natural resources. For the most part, the government officials either discounted or remained silent in response to the claims of the NGO attendees. On the issue of the gold mines, in particular, they deferred to the governor to address the NGO representative's concerns.

VISIT TO ORTHODOX CHURCH

17. (SBU) Following lunch, the Ambassador visited the Orthodox Church of Saint Great Martyr Dimitry Solunsky where she met with and received a tour from Father Dimitry Shushapanov. Father Dimitry explained that for the most part, relations with local authorities and other Talas religious organizations (Islamic, Protestant, and Catholic) were healthy; however, he did cite a local, recently arrived Islamic group which was involved in intimidation tactics aimed toward the church and its parishioners. Father Dimitry noted that church membership had remained constant. He stated that several parishioners had left the country for Russia, including one large Kyrgyz family of attendees, but explained that many former atheists were now getting involved in the church's activities. The church's Sunday school program was also active, and included approximately 25 students.

COMMENT

18. (C) There was clearly two different viewpoints represented at this lunch. While the members of civil society organizations had issues that they wanted to put forward to the Ambassador, the government representatives did not stray from their talking point that "all is well" in Talas (a view that would be enforced in a later meeting with the oblast governor -- septel). Significantly, however, the one thing they all agree on is the rising threat of Islamic extremism in the Talas area.

GFOELLER